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Andrew Jackson, Tennessee and the Union

A PAPER

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ANDREW JACKSON, TENNESSEE AND THE UNION.

I couple the name of Jackson with the title of this paper, because around him crystallized the peculiar political tenets held by the Tennesseans of his day. I do not hold that he moulded the sentiment of Tennessee. On the contrary, I believe the conditions that obtained in her settlement gave a common direction to the political opinions of the people of the State, and that Andrew Jackson, who was a born leader of men, was the recognized exponent only of those sentiments which were common to his countrymen.

The first settlers of Tennessee were practically cut off from communication with the older settlements of the country. The great mountains lay between them and the mother State, on the east; the South was still in the possession of their savage enemies; the far West was but an unexplored French province; and the neighboring North was yet the "dark and bloody ground" where "death was in almost every bush, and every thicket concealed an ambuscade."

In this isolated condition, for nearly a quarter of a century, her undaunted sons defended alone her

scattered settlements against the assaults of a powerful savage foe, aided and encouraged, as they were, by the emissaries of both Spain and Great Britain.

I venture the assertion that no other settlements, however remote, within the territorial limits of any State of the Union, were ever suffered to defend alone so unequal a war—sometimes threatening the very existence of the settlements, and a merciless extermination of their people—for so long a period, without once receiving armed assistance from their mother State. Not only did they defend their own settlements, but in the most critical period of the Revolution, they won for themselves imperishable fame, in the service of the Union, east of the mountains. Utterly impotent to grant any relief to these settlements in the beginning, North Carolina appears to have been criminally indifferent to their necessities after the exigencies of the revolution had passed and left her more able to provide for their safety.

It can hardly be said that Tennessee fared better in this respect, as a Territory of the United States, from 1789 to 1796.

After North Carolina had freed herself of a responsibility she had never met, by ceding her western settlements to the United States, no federal troops ever marched to its defense, even in its most dire extremity. The battles of the Northwest were fought by the national government, and the story of its settlement is linked with the names of

the great commanders who were sent to defend it. The only Territory of the United States that has ever been denied the protection of federal arms was this cast-away child of North Carolina. Not only did its brave pioneers fight its battles alone, but they were misunderstood and elided by the federal government when they were forced, in their necessary defense, to pursue the enemy into his own country and administer to him the chastisement his merciless cruelties so richly merited.

This absolute and complete self-reliance, while it made the tragic story of her settlement more touching and more heroic than that of any other State of the Union, produced in the first settlers of Tennessee a singularly bold, hardy and patriotic people. They were, in the main, either pioneers or soldiers; that indomitable race of men who planted civilization in the wilderness—the heroes of the axe and the rifle—or the patriotic officers and soldiers who constituted the continental line of North Carolina in the revolutionary war.

But Tennessee received a curious compensation from North Carolina for the painful neglect she had suffered. It proved, indeed, a rich heritage. With a bankrupted treasury and an impoverished people, it was the policy of North Carolina to constitute her western territory a fund to reward the “signal bravery and persevering zeal” of her officers and soldiers in the revolutionary war. The Act of Cession provided that the land laid off to the officers and soldiers of her continental line should still

enure to their benefit; and if it should prove insufficient to make good the several provisions for them, the deficiency might be supplied out of any other part of the Territory. And so liberally did she compensate her war-worn veterans out of this "fund," that more than 12,000,000 acres of the choice lands of the State were consumed in their payment. Not only was the military reservation exhausted, but practically all her other lands supposed to be fit for cultivation that had not already been taken up on the occupancy and pre-emption claims of the hardy pioneers, whose rights were equally protected by the Act of Cession, were likewise consumed in satisfying warrants issued for military services. The result was that the great body of the land in Tennessee was originally granted, either under the occupancy claim of the pioneer settler, or upon the military warrant of the revolutionary soldier.*

Could there be a more favorable foundation for the development of the high degree of martial spirit and patriotic sentiment that has won for Tennessee the proud appellation of "Volunteer State"?

Tennessee was the first Territory of the United States to be admitted into the Union as a State, and so far as I know, is the only one to assume that relation with any degree of reluctance. The vote

* The Memorial of the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled—Acts of 1837-38, p. 443 *et seq.*

of the Territory was, perhaps, two to one in favor of admission, but the expression of those counties bordering on the Cumberland river was nearly five to one against it.* This grew out of the question concerning the free navigation of the Mississippi river. As it appeared to the Cumberland settlements, their country was hardly worth the privations, toil and suffering it had cost to win it, if the claim of the Spanish government to the exclusive right to navigate the Mississippi river was to be tolerated. And only less monstrous than the Spanish claim itself was its proposed concession for a period of twenty years, in the treaty negotiated by Mr. Jay. The Mississippi river furnished the only practicable means by which they could reach the markets of the world; and the possibility of that way being closed, even for a limited time, produced the highest degree of political discontent. Some idea of their sentiments on this subject may be obtained from the constitution adopted in 1796, after the Mississippi river had been opened by the treaty of the preceding year. It declares, "That an equal participation of the free navigation of the Mississippi *is one of the inherent rights* of the citizens of this State; it can not, therefore, be conceded to any prince, potentate, power, person or persons, whatever."

The sentiment of Kentucky on this question was not different from that of Tennessee. Two of the

* See tabulated vote in Ramsey's History of Tennessee, p. 648.

most romantic characters who figured in the early history of Tennessee, whose names and whose fame are inseparately linked together, were John Sevier (1745-1815) and Isaac Shelby (1750-1826). Bound together by the closest ties of friendship, they were also united in the patriotic service of their country. Together they had planned the campaign and shared the glorious victory of Kings Mountain. Together, and by name, they were called on by the mother State, to lead their brave followers again across the mountain. And together they received the thanks of North Carolina, for their services to the common cause, at a time when less brave and resourceful men, with even greater means, might well have feared for the safety of their own firesides. Isaac Shelby was appointed one of the commissioners to lay off the land reserved by the State of North Carolina, for the officers and soldiers of her continental line, in 1783, and the work of the commission having been completed, he moved to the State of Kentucky, and was elected the first Governor of that commonwealth. Even Governor Shelby refused to interpose his authority, in 1794, to prevent an armed expedition against New Orleans and the Spanish possessions.

It may be that the large vote against the application by the State of Tennessee for admission into the Union, is to be accounted for on the same theory, upon which, some years afterwards, Governor Shelby explained his position—that is, that it was intended to hasten the action of the government in effecting

a treaty for the navigation of the Mississippi river.* If so, their purpose was soon accomplished, as Spain conceded the free navigation of the Mississippi that very year. In the meantime, however, upon this question, as well as upon the ever present Indian problem, which meant their very existence to the people of the Southwestern Territory, the administration of the government under the Federalist party, if not positively antagonistic, was certainly very unfavorable to their views.

But with the admission of the State into the Union, the control of the federal government passed into the hands of the Republican or Democratic party, whose political principles were entirely in accord with the sentiments of the people of Tennessee. They were prepared, therefore, to support Mr. Madison in the second war with Great Britain; and at the first sound of the tocsin, Gen. Andrew Jackson, with 2500 Tennessee volunteers, offered their services to the government. The martial spirit of the heroic old pioneers and soldiers was on fire, and Gen. Jackson but expressed their sentiments when he offered to march, if necessary, "to the line of Canada, and there offer his aid to the army of his country, and endeavor to wipe off the stain to our military character, occasioned by the recent disasters."

The massacre of Fort Mims touched another responsive chord in the hearts of the old pioneers

* Butler's History of Kentucky (Ed. 1834) page 228.

who had suffered so much at the savage hands of their Indian foes. The feeling was expressed by Gov. Sevier, then in Congress, when he wrote: "I hope in God, that, as the rascals have begun, we shall now have it in our power to pay them for the old and for the new." At this juncture the State of Tennessee, upon its own responsibility, made a call for 3500 volunteers, in addition to the 1500 men already enlisted in the service of the United States.

On the whole, the war of 1812-15 was the most agreeable event that could have happened to the people of Tennessee. This is a condition worthy of note, as it had an important influence on the conduct of the State and the history of the Union. The first effect was, that the disunion sentiments of the Federalists of New England, that culminated in the celebrated Hartford convention, became the most unpopular and odious that the loyal people of Tennessee could conceive. At this very time, Willie Blount (1767-1835) then governor of Tennessee, predicted that "that Convention will never act with open doors; neither will they let the world know any thing of their proceedings"*—a singularly accurate conclusion. But whatever else it may have done, it performed the funeral obsequies of the old Federalist party. As soon as Gen. Jackson and his Tennessee volunteers had "wiped off the stain to our military character" at New Orleans,

* Manuscript letter in my possession.

which was almost simultaneous with the treaty of peace with Great Britain, the Federalist party was dead.

The army that enlisted under General Jackson in this war contained the very flower of Tennessee chivalry, and was, beyond doubt, the grandest body of volunteers that ever took the field in America. Their commander became President of the United States, and three* others of them were afterwards prominent and worthy aspirants for that distinguished honor. Of governors and senators and congressmen, the number is absolutely astounding. These men, with many of their neighbors, became scattered over most of the southern and southwestern States, where, in the main, they propagated the ideas and sentiments they had imbibed in Tennessee, multiplying many fold the influence of that State. The first two Senators from Missouri were Tennesseans. The first Governor, the first two Senators, and the first Congressman from Arkansas; the liberator of Texas, who was the first President of the Republic, and one of her first United States Senators after she was admitted into the Union; the first Governor of Louisiana, and the first Governor† and one of the first Senators from California, were all Tennesseans.

Thomas H. Benton (1782-1858) began the practice of the law at Franklin, Tennessee, and was a

* Hugh L. White, Thomas H. Benton and Sam Houston.

† Peter H. Burnett.

member of the Senate of that State in 1809. He was one of the earliest friends and supporters of General Jackson, having been aide-de-camp on his staff, and also the Colonel of a regiment of Tennessee volunteers in the war of 1812. In 1815 he moved to the Territory of Missouri, and became one of her first United States Senators when she was admitted into the Union in 1820. His associate in the Senate was David Barton (1785-1837) who was also a Tennessean.

In 1828 there was still but one political party in the United States, Jackson, Clay, Crawford and Adams all adhering, nominally, to the Republican or Democratic party. In this situation Mr. Benton, whose wife was a niece of Mrs. Clay, supported Mr. Clay for the presidency. But when the election was thrown into the House of Representatives he became the ardent supporter of General Jackson, in which he never wavered or faltered afterwards until the day of his death. Even as late as 1856 he supported James Buchanan for the presidency against his own son-in-law, John C. Fremont, on the ground of his confidence that if Mr. Buchanan were elected he would restore the principles of the Jackson administration.

Sam Houston (1793-1863) grew to manhood in Blount County, Tennessee, and in 1813 enlisted as a volunteer in the service of the United States, was promoted to be an ensign, and distinguished himself in the battle of Horseshoe Bend, under General Jackson. He began the study of law at Nashville

in 1818, was elected District Attorney in 1819, was a Representative in Congress in 1823 and 1825 (in which position he had the honor of appointing Mathew F. Maury (1806-1873), one of his constituents, to a cadetship in the National Naval Academy), and was Governor of the State in 1827. In 1829 he resigned the office of Governor and retired to the great West in the most dramatic manner. In the West he became the great liberator of Texas, the hero of San Jacinto, the first President of the Lone Star Republic, and when she was admitted into the Union in 1847, was one of her first United States Senators. He was always a devoted personal and political friend of General Jackson, whom he saw laid to rest at the Hermitage. He was elected Governor of Texas in 1859, but had his office declared vacant when the State seceded from the Union in 1861.

Clement C. Clay (1789-1866) grew up in Grainger County, Tennessee, was educated at the old Blount College (University of Tennessee) at Knoxville, studied law under the distinguished statesman and jurist, Hugh L. White, and was admitted to the bar in 1809. In 1811 he removed to Alabama, and was Chief Justice of the State at the age of thirty years. From 1829 to 1836 he was a Representative in Congress, and was a conspicuous defender of the leading measures of General Jackson's administration. In 1835, when the Democratic party split on the election of Jackson's successor, Clay was elected Governor on the Van Buren ticket, in opposition to

the ticket headed by his old friend, Judge White. His opponent was another distinguished Tennessean, Enoch Parsons (1776-1846), who, as a member of the Tennessee Legislature, had drawn and introduced the bill calling for 3500 volunteers for the relief of the Mississippi Territory, on the massacre of Fort Mims, in 1813, and who with others, had endorsed Governor Blount's note for \$20,000 to equip them. In 1839 Mr. Clay was elected to the United States Senate, and served to the close of the extra session of 1841, when he resigned on account of ill health.

What Mr. Hallum calls the reigning family in Arkansas was composed almost wholly of Tennesseans. The Conway and Sevier families were among the early pioneers of Tennessee. Thomas Conway was Speaker of the Senate, while John Sevier was Governor of the short lived State of Franklin, while his brother, George Conway, was the first Major General of the Tennessee State Militia, and was the immediate predecessor in that position and intimate personal friend of General Andrew Jackson.

James Sevier Conway (1798-1855), a son of Thomas Conway, went to Arkansas about 1820, and upon the admission of the State into the Union, became her first Governor.

Ambrose H. Sevier (1801-1848) was the son of John Sevier and Susan Conway. His father was the only son who survived the distinguished old hero of Point Pleasant and Kings Mountain, Val-

entine Sevier, whose career closed in so much sadness and pathos. He went to Arkansas with his cousins, the Conways, where he was first clerk and then a member and speaker of Territorial House of Representatives.

His cousin, Henry W. Conway (1793-1827), a native Tennessean and *protege* of General Jackson, who, as a mere boy, had served under him in the war of 1812, after having been elected in 1823 Territorial Delegate from Arkansas to Congress, and re-elected in 1825 and 1827, was killed in a duel with Robert Crittenden, and Mr. Sevier was elected as his successor, a position he continued to hold until the admission of the State into the Union in 1836.

In that year he was elected one of the first United States Senators from Arkansas, and continued in that office until 1848, when he resigned his seat, and under appointment of President Polk, negotiated, in connection with Judge Clifford, the treaty of Gaudaloupe Hidalgo, by which we acquired our vast possessions from Mexico.

The other Senator elected by the State of Arkansas in 1836 was William S. Fulton (1795-1844). In 1816, Gov. Fulton went into the law office of the celebrated Tennessee advocate and statesman, Felix Grundy, and the following year began the practice of his profession in Gallatin. In 1818 he was appointed Secretary to General Jackson, and served in that capacity during the Seminole war. By appointment of President Jackson, he was Gov-

ernor of the Territory of Arkansas, and upon her admission into the Union was elected one of her first Senators, and held the position until his death in 1844.

Archibald Vell (1797-1847) was the first member of Congress from Arkansas. He was a typical Tennessean. As a boy he was a Captain under General Jackson in the Creek war, where he bore himself so gallantly as to attract the attention of his great commander. He also served through the Seminole war.

He was practicing law in Fayetteville, Tennessee, when, in 1832, President Jackson appointed him a Territorial Judge in Arkansas. He cherished an ambition to be the first Governor of the State, but was shut out by a provision of the Constitution requiring a four years' residence to make him eligible. But he was elected her first Representative in Congress. He declined a re-election to Congress, and was elected Governor in 1840. At the request of the State Democratic Convention in 1844, he resigned the office of Governor to enter the contest against Judge Walker for Congress. He was elected, but in 1846 he resigned his seat in Congress to take command of the Arkansas troops in the Mexican war, and fell gallantly leading his men at Buena Vista, closing his career, as he had begun it, in the military service of his country.

But I can not give even a brief account of all the distinguished statesmen sent out from Tennessee. Among the Senators I will mention Wm. C. C.

Claiborne (1775-1817), an old pioneer of Tennessee, who served with Andrew Jackson in the convention that framed the Constitution of the State, and succeeded him as a Representative in Congress when the latter was elected to the Senate. He was the first Governor of the Mississippi Territory, and was elected Governor of Louisiana when that State was admitted into the Union in 1812, and was one of her United States Senators elect when he died in 1817.

Alexander Porter (1786-1844), a member of the Senate from Louisiana, was a member of the Nashville bar, who moved to Louisiana at the urgent solicitation of Andrew Jackson. Alexander Barrow (1801-1846) was a native Tennessean who began the practice of law in Nashville, and afterwards moved to Louisiana, where he was elected to the United States Senate. Robert H. Adams (1792-1830) was one of the most gifted men this country has produced. He was a native of East Tennessee, who moved to Nashville, and thence to Mississippi, where, after attaining the highest eminence in his profession, he was elected to the United States Senate, but died the same year. Stephen Adams (1804-1857) came to Tennessee with his parents when he was three years old, and was a member of the Senate of that State in 1830, and moved to Mississippi in 1834, where, after being a Circuit Judge and member of Congress from the State at large, in 1852, he defeated Jefferson Davis for a seat in the United States Senate, made vacant by the resigna-

tion of Henry S. Foote, who was elected Governor that year. He now sleeps in Elmwood Cemetery at Memphis. William McKendree Gwin (1805-1885) was a native of Sumner County, Tennessee, moved to Mississippi, where he was appointed United States Marshal by President Jackson; was elected to Congress; was appointed to superintend the erection of the Custom House at New Orleans by President Polk; went to California, was a member of her Constitutional Convention, and when she was admitted to the Union, was one of her first Senators, which position he continued to hold up to the war.

Among the Congressmen she furnished to her sister States may be mentioned the distinguished soldier, Wm. Barksdale (1821-1863), a native of Rutherford County; Judge H. S. Bennett (1807-), who was born in Williamson County; the great criminal lawyer, Reuben Davis (1813-1873); W. S. Featherstone (1821-); Wm. M. Gwin, afterwards United States Senator from California; Benj. D. Nabers, and Daniel B. Wright, all of the State of Mississippi. From Alabama there was Geo. S. Houston (1811-1879), a native of Williamson County, who was eighteen years a member of the Federal House of Representatives, and chairman, successively, of the Ways and Means and Judiciary Committees of that body; Gen. Geo. W. Crabb (-1847), a brother of Judge Henry Crabb, of the Supreme Court of Tennessee; Felix G. McConnell (-1846); Sydenham Moore and

Alexander White. But I will not pursue the list further.*

The old Federalist party having died, as I have said, in 1815, James Monroe was elected and re-elected President, practically without opposition. In the meantime Jackson began to be spoken of for his successor. But he was not then at the head of any political party. All the candidates were professed Republicans or Democrats. Jackson received a plurality of the popular and electoral votes, but was not elected. The House of Representatives chose John Quincy Adams, and Henry Clay was appointed his Secretary of State.

At the very beginning of his administration, in his inaugural address, and in his first message to Congress, President Adams manifested his predilections for the old Federalist doctrines. Clay's fortunes were cast with his. Crawford was an invalid. Andrew Jackson, from that time, became the acknowledged leader of the Democratic party. Thenceforth the old Tennesseans, wherever found, with few exceptions, rallied to his support. There was never a division in Tennessee until 1836, when the Democratic party split on President Jackson's successor. Jackson favored Van Buren, and Hugh L. White, one of the grandest men, take him all in

* See "Parton's Jackson," "Roosevelt's Benton," "Bruce's Houston," "Foote's Bench and Bar of the Southwest," "Garrett's Public Men of Alabama," "Lanman's Dictionary of Congress," "Sparks' Memories of Fifty Years," "Elmwood Cemetery," and "Hallum's Biographical and Pictorial History of Arkansas."

all, this State has ever produced, ran in opposition, and carried the State. The breach was permanent. The State was never again carried by the National Democracy until she developed, in Andrew Johnson, another great Democratic leader, second only to Andrew Jackson, who utterly routed the Whigs in 1854, and opened the way for the victory of Buchanan in 1856.

In 1829 Jackson was elected President by an overwhelming majority, and commenced the most important administration this country has ever witnessed, to only one event in which it is my purpose to allude.

I have already contrasted the loyalty of Tennessee with the disunion sentiments of the Eastern States in 1815. At the threshold of his administration President Jackson was confronted with similar conditions in the South. I refer to the doctrine of nullification, of which John C. Calhoun was the great exponent. Calhoun had not broken with the President at this time, and Robert Y. Hayne was one of his most intimate friends and partisan supporters.

But President Jackson was equal to the emergency. As early as the 13th of April, 1830, at the Jefferson banquet, he electrified the country with this toast: "Our Federal Union: it must be preserved." And this was the feeling of all his old Tennessee friends who had expressed with him their horror of the disloyalty of the East in 1815.

I do not care to go into the question of nullification, as it arose in 1832. But we owe it to Jackson and the Tennessee influence that disunion sentiments, although springing up this time among a class of his own supporters, was again silenced, and the doctrine of nullification forever put to rest.

I believe I quote the venerable President of our State Historical Society correctly, in substance, in the statement that it was Andrew Jackson who made possible the preservation of the Union in 1861-65. And why may it not be so? Were not his most devoted followers the warmest friends of the Union? Where was Thomas H. Benton when the dark clouds began to appear above the political horizon? After an honorable service of thirty years he lost his seat in the United States Senate; and when elected to Congress from his own district he was defeated for a re-election, as he was likewise, in 1856, defeated for Governor of Missouri on account of his bold, outspoken union sentiments. And he died still proclaiming the same devotion to the Union he was wont to applaud in Andrew Jackson.

Then, there was Sam Houston, the idol of the State of Texas, who, even at her behest, refused his assent to her separation from the Union. He had been elected Governor in 1859, and when his State seceded he was deposed from his office because he still adhered to the Union.

When the war came on but two Southern members kept their seats in the United States Senate.

They were both Tennesseans. Wm. K. Sebastian (1812-1864) was born in Hickman County, Tennessee, and was educated at Columbia College. He went to Arkansas in 1835, and was elected District Attorney, Circuit Judge, Supreme Judge, and in 1848 was appointed, and subsequently three times elected, to the United States Senate. He was expelled in 1861, but the act of expulsion was rescinded in 1878. The other was Andrew Johnson (1808-1876), of Tennessee, the disciple of Andrew Jackson, who, in February, 1861, said from his place in the Senate: "I believe that if Andrew Jackson were President of the United States this glorious Union of ours would still be intact. Perhaps it might be jarred a little in some places, but not sufficiently to disturb the harmony and general concord of the whole. That is my opinion. I do not say it to disparage others, but I believe that this would have been the case if he had been President, pursuing the policy which I feel certain he would have pursued in such an emergency." He was more fortunate than Sebastian, in that his sincerity and honesty of purpose were never questioned. He not only served out his term, but was elected Vice President of the United States while his State was still out of the Union.

Tennessee herself went out of the Union in 1861, as she went into it in 1796, with great reluctance. Her leading public men, those who had grown up under the influence that surrounded Andrew Jackson, such men as Cave Johnson, John Bell and

Andrew Ewing, earnestly opposed secession in 1860, and an overwhelming majority of her people voted for the Union when the question was first submitted to them in February, 1861, but it was only when war became flagrant, when blood had been shed, when armies were in the field, when there was no other alternative left but to fight, either for their own section against the Union, or for the Union against their own section, that they chose the former course.

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